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SUBJECT: DISTANCES AND DISORGANIZATION HAMPER ASSESSMENT OF
HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN KIDAL

REF: A. BAMAKO 00567

[B](#). BAMAKO 00415

[C](#). BAMAKO 00575

[D](#). 07 BAMAKO 01080

[1](#). Summary: On June 26 the Embassy met with International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) delegate Andreas Schmidt to discuss the living conditions of populations displaced by fighting in northern Mali. A hand-written report sent to the Embassy by the Director of the Malian Red Cross in Kidal on June 24 said displaced populations around the towns of Kidal, Aguelhok, Abeibera and Tinzwawaten lack sufficient quantities of food, water and medicine. The Kidal Red Cross also reported an outbreak of measles in Tinzwawaten and Guinea Worm in Abeibera. Mr. Schmidt, who accompanied the Kidal Red Cross to Kidal and Aguelhok and is based in Gao, said it was difficult to discern whether the needs of displaced populations were a product of dislocations caused by recent fighting or simply due to northern Mali's harsh living conditions and long dry season. Schmidt said the remoteness of many displaced populations and local officials' lack of organization hampered efforts to fully assess the humanitarian situation north of Kidal. On June 19 Nina Walet Intallou, who serves as the highest, and only, elected woman from the region of Kidal, reiterated concerns expressed by the Governor and Mayor of Kidal regarding an impending humanitarian crisis (Ref. A). End Summary.

Red Cross and ICRC Findings

[2](#). On June 26 ICRC delegate Andreas Schmidt shared with the Embassy some of his findings from a recent trip to the towns of Kidal and Aguelhok in northern Mali. Schmidt is in the process of setting up an ICRC office in Gao and said the ICRC is seeking to expand its presence in northern Mali and northern Niger. The Malian Red Cross in Kidal facilitated Mr. Schmidt's visit to the Kidal region and arranged for him to meet with 26 Malian soldiers captured by the Tuareg Alliance for Democracy and Change (ADC) and 57 Malian soldiers captured by Ibrahim Bahanga. Schmidt also visited an unspecified number of Tuareg combatants held by the Malians in prisons in Kidal and Bamako. He said both sides were respecting international norms and conventions in regard to their treatment of prisoners.

[3](#). Schmidt said he found it hard to discern whether the dire conditions confronting displaced populations in northern Mali were due to recent hostilities between Tuareg rebels and the Malian military or simply a product of northern Mali's harsh environment and a prolonged dry season. Security complications prevented Schmidt from visiting any towns in

northern Mali other than Aguelhok and Kidal. He said that populations camped outside the towns of Aguelhok and Tin Essako were strong candidates for humanitarian assistance but that the ICRC needed a more complete assessment of their needs. He also said that the ICRC intended to evaluate the results of 20 tons of food and other supplies recently distributed to displaced people camped on the outskirts of Tinzawaten (Ref. B) before moving ahead with assistance plans for other displaced populations.

¶4. On June 24 the Embassy received a hand-written copy of a report by the Kidal office of the Malian Red Cross on the humanitarian situation in northern Mali. The report said "panic" amongst inhabitants in the Kidal region continued to spread despite the recent lull in fighting between the Malian army and disparate Tuareg rebel groups. In the area around the town of Aguelhoc the Red Cross identified 940 families displaced by recent fighting and now living in make-shift desert encampments. Approximately 3500 families in the city of Kidal are also in need of assistance due to lack of food, water and rising prices. The Red Cross team was unable to visit the town of Abeibera but the town's mayor estimated 320 displaced families in need. The Red Cross reported an outbreak of measles affecting displaced populations camped around the town of Tinzawaten. In Aguelhok the Red Cross reported "several hundred" new cases of Guinea Worm arising from tainted water supplies.

¶5. Back in Bamako, Schmidt told the Embassy it was difficult for him to assess the accuracy of the numbers provided by the Red Cross due to the remoteness of many displaced populations. He also said that local leaders in Kidal were

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not as organized as he had expected and that he encountered difficulties simply compiling an assessment of vulnerable populations within Kidal's city limits. Schmidt said he encouraged the Governor of Kidal and other local officials to better organize themselves in order to facilitate assistance from international organizations.

Kidal's Highest (and Only) Elected Woman Official

¶6. On June 19 Nina Walet Intallou told the Embassy that as many as 70 to 80 percent of Kidal's inhabitants have left the city to live in desert encampments throughout northern Mali. Intallou is a member of Mali's 75 seat High Council of Collectivities. She was elected Mayor of Kidal in 1999 but the result was later overturned by the Malian government. Intallou estimated that approximately 4,000 families are still living within the city of Kidal. Many of those who have not fled the town, said Intallou, are single or elderly women or widows who do not have the ability to provide for themselves. Intallou said resupply vehicles are no longer traveling to Kidal and that food within the town is growing increasingly scarce. On June 18 Intallou's sister-in-law in Kidal slipped into a diabetic coma and died due to the absence of any doctors or medicine within the city.

¶7. Living conditions in encampments erected by families fleeing fighting between the Malian army and Tuareg rebels are reportedly no better. Intallou said displaced populations are living in pockets scattered throughout the Kidal region. She estimated that, in addition to the 4,000 families still in the city of Kidal, there are another 2,000 families camped around Anefif and Essouk, 2,000 more near Tessalit, 500 in the area of Bourghessa and Tinzawaten, and 1,500 between Abeibera and Tin Essako. Intallou estimated that each family consisted of around 5 individuals.

¶8. The town of Aguelhok has been empty since Tuareg rebels attacked the Malian military base there on May 21. Intallou reported that the Mayor of Aguelhok and some of the men return to the town during the day, but sleep in desert

encampments each night. Women and children from Aguelhok are all living in encampments in the bush.

¶9. Intallou said transportation corridors to affected areas in northern Mali were open and that humanitarian aid could be delivered provided the shipments were coordinated with local government officials and fraction chiefs. The Governor of Kidal recently told Embassy staff that the Malian government had intended to deliver a quantity of millet to displaced populations in northern Mali but was unable to do so due to transportation problems. Intallou questioned whether the Malian government intended to send any assistance at all and noted that Tuaregs do not eat millet. "It is amazing that they could think of sending millet to Kidal," said Intallou. She asked the U.S. to provide support to displaced populations in Kidal and said that northern populations still remember U.S. planes airlifting relief supplies to the northern town of Tessalit during the drought of 1973-1974.

¶10. Intallou also pointed out that the current trend toward direct budgetary support popular with European donors negatively impacts marginalized regions like Kidal. Direct budgetary support was one of the key topics at the recent round table for international donors held in Bamako June 12-13 (Ref. C). Intallou said the provision of direct budgetary support to bodies like the Ministry of Territorial Administration undermines Mali's strategy of decentralization by giving government officials in Bamako control over resources intended for rural populations. One demand articulated by Tuareg rebels is the authority to bypass government officials in Bamako in order to deal directly with international donors. Intallou said that peace in northern Mali will be difficult to achieve without some kind of agreement regarding direct donor support for Kidal.

¶11. Comment: The Malian government has not indicated any intention to request humanitarian assistance for populations displaced by fighting in northern Mali. As the ICRC discovered, assessing the living conditions of displaced populations in the region of Kidal is complicated by the remoteness of their encampments, the generally harsh environment, and continued instability. ICRC representative Schmidt observed that local leaders of disaster-struck areas

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often greet arriving members of the Red Cross with lists of the number of individuals impacted by any given humanitarian crisis. Schmidt was surprised to find that officials in Kidal and Aguelhok were unable to produce information on the number of individuals requiring humanitarian assistance. When Mali requested relief for flood victims in central, southern and western Mali in September 2007, the Malian Government provided detailed lists that specified the number of individuals left homeless, the number of houses destroyed and the number of farm animals lost (Ref. D). Such a detailed accounting of the humanitarian situation in Kidal is unlikely, meaning that any assessment of food, water and medicine shortages for those displaced by fighting in the north will continue to entail a fair amount of guesswork.

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